



# RESOURCE MOBILIZATION FOR RESEARCH:

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

The strength and long-term survival of IDRC grantees depends on their ability to adapt to an ever evolving funding landscape, continuously attract donors, and generate funding from a range of sources. An overreliance on project-based grants can leave organizations chasing short-term goals with little money to invest in long-term planning, staff development and retention or in tools and infrastructure to strengthen their work. From 2011 to 2016 the Donor Partnerships Division has worked with IDRC grantees to help them increase and diversify their funding through the Resource Mobilization for Research program. This paper summarizes our learning on investing in grantees' organizational capacity.

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## The challenge: Equipping research organizations for long-term success

To foster new knowledge that can improve lives and livelihoods across the developing world, IDRC invests in southern-based institutions that lead and promote the uptake of innovative research. Like many funding organizations, it provides the majority of its funding through short-term, project-based grants. But the strength and long-term survival of IDRC grantees depends on their ability to adapt to an ever-evolving funding landscape, continuously attract donors, and generate funding from a range of sources. An overreliance on project-based grants can leave organizations chasing short-term goals, with little money to invest in long-term planning, staff development and retention, or in tools and infrastructure to strengthen their work. As a result, grantees' sustainability can be undermined by a range of institutional weaknesses, such as a lack of vision, low visibility, and insufficient technical and human resources.

Given the interest of other donors and development partners in ensuring the long-term value of their investments, we present here learning from IDRC's Resource Mobilization for Research program, a 5 year program to strengthen the organizational performance and financial sustainability of grantee organizations. . Ongoing monitoring and documented learning were built into the RMR support process, and a short follow-up survey was conducted<sup>1</sup> among grantees and the staff and advisers who worked most closely with them. The lessons presented here draw on:

- Reports from grantees and advisers
- Regular contact with advisers
- Grantee "stories of change"
- Survey responses from grantees, staff, and advisers

## Our approach: Targeted investments in organizational change

Since 2004, IDRC's Donor Partnership Division (DPD) has worked with grantees to help them increase and diversify their funding sources. Early efforts—through the Capacity Building for Resource Mobilization program—were developed based on the knowledge that available fundraising expertise were dominated by northern-based institutions and not well-matched to the regional context and research focus of IDRC grantees. Earlier work also recognized that standalone workshops were not sufficient to address the range of internal issues that grantees needed to address.

**Resource mobilization** refers to the process of attracting and managing the human, financial and physical resources (including relationship management) required by an organization to be sustainable.

Building on a solid foundation, in 2011 we retooled our approach and launched the Resource Mobilization for Research (RMR) program. The aim was to test the effect of more sustained, localized support, focusing modest resources on organizations over a longer period. RMR used two main approaches to deliver the program: a cohort model that grouped peers, and individually managed RMR grants. From 2011 to 2016, DPD provided CA\$1,600,000 in RMR grants, ranging from \$30,000 to \$418,000, following an organizational capacity assessment. In total, 16 IDRC grantees<sup>2</sup> participated in this program.

<sup>1</sup> With an overall response rate of approximately 50%. See Annex B for the survey.

<sup>2</sup> See Annex C: RMR Participating Grantees

## The cohort model

Responding in part to internal IDRC demand for assistance to help former grantees achieve financial sustainability following program closures, the cohort model targeted regional and thematic clusters of research organizations, the first one in Francophone West Africa, the second cohort in East Africa.

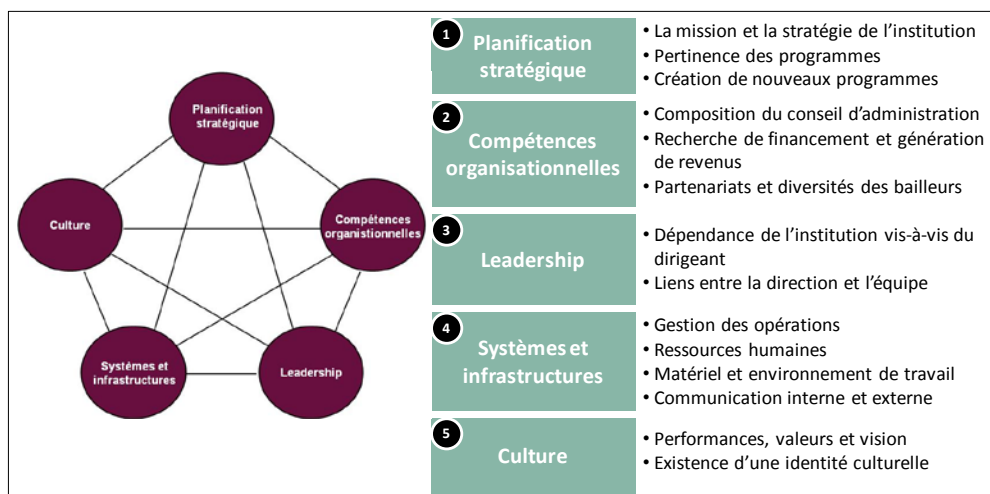
From 2011 to 2013, the services of a Dakar-based associate of the Dalberg development advisory group were retained to work with five West African research organizations. For the second cohort of four East African organizations, from 2013 to 2015, IDRC contracted the South African organization Inyathelo to provide technical support in organizational development.

Similar approaches were used in working with both cohorts. In addition to matching these organizations with regionally-based technical expertise, IDRC gave each a small grant of \$25,000 to \$35,000 to use on selected areas of organizational strengthening. In both cohorts, the proposal process required applicants to identify their strengths and challenges with regards to financial sustainability. These priorities were then validated through an initial assessment that looked across the whole organization. Participants were then required to attend an inception workshop covering the fundamentals of organizational development for resource mobilization. Though the technical advisers differed in their approaches, both applied a systems lens, addressing resource mobilization within the context of overall organizational performance. Inyathelo's Advancement model articulates 10 elements, while Dalberg used a five-point framework that encompassed various sub-elements of strategic planning, organizational competencies, leadership, systems and infrastructure, and organizational culture.

In both cohorts, participating organizations had much in common, including geographic location, a past funding relationship with IDRC, and a shared focus of research. The West African cohort grouped organizations from Benin, Niger, and Senegal working on environmental sustainability, agricultural development, and climate change. The East African cohort brought together community- and university-



Figure 1. Inyathelo's advancement model



based organizations in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Malawi working on health-related research.

Figure 2. Dalberg's five-point framework for resource mobilization

Other key features of the cohort model were:

- **Peer learning and exchange** among cohort members through structured workshops;
- The use of **storytelling** by grantees to document and reflect on their change process; and
- A **triangular relationship** between the funder, the technical advisor and participating grantees. IDRC remained in regular contact with advisory groups and played an active role in shaping workshops and a framework for documenting change.

The timeframe of support differed slightly between the two cohorts as grantees indicated a need for additional time to implement activities: West African organizations had 15 months to address the priorities they identified, while participants in the later East African cohort had 18 months,

### Individual grants

The RMR program also supported former IDRC grantees that were interested in, and capable of, working individually to ramp up their resource mobilization capacity. As in the cohort model, individual grantees underwent institutional assessments and worked with expert consultants to address targeted areas of organizational capacity that could enhance their financial sustainability. The RMR program supported seven organizations and one university through this approach.

The timeframe for individual grantees ranged from 13 to 29. Excluding the exceptional grant to Makerere, the average grant size was \$76,436 Canadian dollars, covering both technical assistance and the investments in organizational change.

The largest of the individual grants — \$418,128 Canadian dollars — was made to Uganda's Makerere University. This grant differed in scale and focus from others. It reflected IDRC's interest in exploring how to support southern-based universities in resource mobilization; the importance of Makerere as a significant IDRC's regional partner in sub-Saharan Africa; and the university's its commitment to continue on a pathway of major reforms that had been funded by Sweden's international development agency up to 2012.

## The results: Modest investments bring new strengths and opportunities

As with IDRC's earlier Capacity Building for Resource Mobilization efforts, the question of financial sustainability served as an entry point through which organizations examined, and worked to strengthen, a range of capacities across the board. Within a relatively short time span (13 to 24 months), and with fairly modest resources, almost all of the 16 participating institutions achieved their short-term priority goals.

***"It [RMR] gave us the opportunity to focus efforts on areas [...] that needed investment but were not directly related to project outputs."***

While most did not see immediate gains in their bottom line, they accomplished important internal changes that put them on a more solid footing for future funding success. To cite just a few examples, within the West African grantee cohort:

- Innovations Environnement Développement (IED) Afrique increased its participation in regional and international events, expanded its publication base, and, as of 2013, had a growing number of successful and pending proposals<sup>3</sup>.
- The Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger (INRAN) implemented new accounting software that enables it to generate faster reports, based on more reliable data, and better monitor its finances.
- Initiatives pour un Développement Intégré Durable (IDID) likewise upgraded its financial software. It also consolidated its knowledge base with a secure internal server that serves as a central information platform. It enhanced its image by investing in new office space and can now generate additional income from renting meeting rooms to other organizations.

***"The institution has been able to mobilise more resources and grow our donor***

The East African cohort also saw tangible changes in their mode of operation:

- The Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology (KCCO) Tanzania expanded and strengthened its board of directors, and developed a streamlined and integrated financial management system for its three country offices<sup>4</sup>.
- Uganda's Maternal Newborn and Child Health Institute (MNCHI) revised its five-year strategic plan taking into account significant shifts that had taken place internally since its launch, and among international funders, who were turning their attention to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

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<sup>3</sup> In correspondence between IDRC and IED in June 2016, IED indicated that it increased its annual budget from CFA 229 million in 2011 to CFA 524 million in 2015 and then to CFA 880 million in 2015. During this same period, IED also doubled the number of researchers it retained on staff.

<sup>4</sup> In correspondence between IDRC and KCCO in June 2016, KCCO indicated that annual revenues ranged between USD 1.2 million and USD 1.4 million during its leadership transition.

And among organizations that autonomously engaged technical expertise:

- Uganda's Lacor Hospital and its funder, the Teasdale-Corti Foundation, tested a local approach to diversify its funding, in part by drawing on potential donors in Uganda. It also developed a compelling web-based narrative to link up with an international fundraising campaign—Become Part of the Story.
- Senegal's Centre de Suivi Ecologique achieved an excellent result on its first attempt at qualifying for an ISO 9001 certification. Meeting this international quality management standard may give CSE a significant competitive edge.

***"The project was cost effective as we were able to take the lessons learnt beyond the lifespan of the project and build on what we had achieved."***

Grantees felt the project gave them the space to work on important issues that would otherwise have been neglected. In a follow-up survey of organizations that had taken part in IDRC's RMR program, there was near unanimous consent among grantees who responded that the process had helped them focus on the right organizational priorities<sup>5</sup>. Significantly, all who responded also indicated that they had been able to sustain the changes made.

***"The new [...] director and his assistant are now in charge of the country office; the new accounting system is up and running [...]; and the board is fully functional."***

While the scale of funding was much lower than a typical research project, participants felt it was worthwhile. All respondents agreed the RMR support was cost effective, and just over two-thirds<sup>6</sup> said they had contributed additional funding to support aspects of work carried out in the project.

Eight out of nine respondents stated that their RMR activities led to new projects or directions their organizations had undertaken after the RMR support has concluded.

***"We had 18 months to work with the grant and we managed to accomplish all three priorities in time."***

Some examples included:

- Winning five new project grants due to improved accounting and governance systems, which were among the conditions for funding.
- Completing policy and procedural manuals that have transformed accountability and transparency.
- Tapping a wider pool of funders, going beyond those focused on research.

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<sup>5</sup> Ten out of 11 respondents agreed. 100% of responding grantees felt RMR helped them focus on the right priorities.

<sup>6</sup> Eight out of 11 respondents. 89% of responding grantees said RMR led to new projects or new directions.

## Pathways to sustainability: How research organizations can enhance resource mobilization

While organizations involved in the RMR program were motivated first and foremost by the need to strengthen their long term finances, all cohort and individual grantees undertook a rigorous examination across their operations to identify their strengths and the challenges they faced and to choose a small number of priority areas to work on. The most common priority areas that emerged from organizational assessment were: aspects of governance, strategic planning, revenue diversification, communications, financial management, and human resource strengthening. For most, working on a short list of priority areas—even with modest resources and over a short timeframe—paid off in new strengths, new directions, and new potential sources of funding.

The following strategies were used by grantees to enable organizational change.

### Align strategies with mission and strengths

A reliance on project funding provides little room for overhead costs to support reflection on longer term strategic directions. A common challenge among grantees was the tension between the short-term pressures of securing and delivering on project grants, and their need to plan for the future. For a number of participating grantees, building their resource mobilization potential began with developing a forward-looking strategic plan that helped them to capitalize on organizational strengths, such as areas of expertise or facilities that could be rented out, while respecting their core vision or mission.

One such organization was IDID, a Benin-based NGO with an ambitiously wide focus, touching on climate change, renewable energy, information technologies and rural development, and sanitation. Through successive projects from 2008 to 2011, IDID had increased its expertise in food security and climate change. But the organization lacked systematic planning, monitoring, and management. Through the RMR project, IDID focused a new strategic plan on three domains where it knew it had the greatest competency: agriculture and food security; climate change adaptation; and sustainable management of fragile ecosystems. Consistent with its original vision and areas of expertise, these form a more streamlined base for targeted strengthening and resource mobilization plans.

Strategies must also be reviewed and renewed periodically so that organizations remain nimble in a changing funding landscape. In Uganda, the MNCHI, which trains health workers, conducts research, and works to strengthen maternal, newborn, and child health service delivery, had been established in 2012 by Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST). An initial strategic plan had been developed to facilitate its formal establishment by MUST, but with rapid evolution in the local and international environment, it needed to better position itself within this changing context. Through RMR, it has now articulated its strategic direction, clear management and governance structures, human resource development plans, and a financial overview, while remaining anchored to its original “three pillars”: training, research, and outreach programming. Through this process it has developed a clear case for financial support and continues to position itself to attract potential funders and partners. The documentation of its strategic plan underpins its messaging and relationship building.

Jembi Health Systems NPC (Jembi) is a South African NGO originally established through an IDRC- project to sustain health systems strengthening activities in low income countries. While it is headquartered in Cape Town, Jembi has a research laboratory at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban along with country offices in Rwanda and Mozambique. Jembi evolved rapidly since its inception and found itself



lacking a clear road map to long term stability, at both strategic and operational levels. It also depended heavily on its founding leader for revenue generation. Through a collaborative process that drew input from across the organization, Jembi identified a programming strategy for the medium-term that included clarifying its value-added, and the roles and relationships between its head office and programming run out of Rwanda and Mozambique. The organizational strategy, developed over two years, articulated a vision, mission statement, and set of values to guide Jembi. It also began work on strategies for each country program to guide future work at the country level.

### Invest in infrastructure and systems

In some cases, strategic assessments and realignment led to the realization that organizations were lacking critical infrastructure, or needed to significantly revamp their internal systems. Here, relatively small investments have helped put organizations on a more secure professional footing.

In Guatemala, the Centro de Estudios para la Equidad y Gobernanza en los Sistemas de Salud (CEGSS), a small community based research organization had grown rapidly since its start up in 2000, and received substantial major research grants from IDRC. As the last was closing, the organization faced a few challenges including a need to diversify revenues streams, strengthen communication and dissemination strategies and improve accountability through updating information and financial systems. In response to latter and as part of a broad strategy to enhance its organizational performance, it aimed to enhance its accountability and data security by investing in its information infrastructure. With help from an external consultant, CEGSS opted for a cloud-based storage and security system rather than investing in physical infrastructure. A cost-effective strategy for a relatively small organization.

Both IDID and INRAN put in place new accounting software that greatly helped the organization to move away from manual bookkeeping or outdated software. It helped financial information management and reduced the burden of reporting to multiple funders and internal stakeholders such as a board of directors. INRAN, with some 40 partners and a number of regional offices, has now centralized its financial system. The results: it can generate faster reports, more reliable data, and monitor finances by activity area and sources of funding. In addition to upgrading its financial software, IDID put in place a secure internal server and invested in new office space. As a result, it is better able to preserve its knowledge base, and has improved staff morale. IDID is able to capitalize on its new space by renting out meeting rooms to other organizations, further diversifying its revenue base.

### Enable leaders to focus on strategic directions

The ability to execute on strategic plans depends on organizations having effective leaders who can focus on the future and build supportive relationships. But the resource constraints facing many grantees meant that leaders were tied up in operational management, with little time to map the “big picture”. This leadership style, where day-to-day decisions had to pass through executive leaders, could also create organizational bottlenecks. A number of grantees were able to create space for executives to function more strategically through changes in leadership style and the effective use of delegation.

IED Afrique and the Institut Africain de Gestion Urbaine (IAGU) were two West African organizations with strong leaders that worked to separate management functions from strategic oversight. By delegating many day-to-day tasks, they freed up time to focus on long-term needs, strengthening strategic planning and resource mobilization. This delegation had the added benefit of empowering and

motivating staff. It also improved internal knowledge sharing and reporting to donors by formalizing administration and communication procedures.

A change in leadership at KCCO Tanzania was part of the impetus that led the organization to embark on a process of change, focused on financial management, governance, and leadership. The outgoing director had been the organization's founder and chief accountant. With his departure, KCCO Tanzania sought to build capacity at several levels, including at the leadership level. Along with a new director, KCCO recruited an assistant director who could coordinate programs. With training support from Inyathelo, the assistant director took over projects and assisted the director in day-to-day oversight and management. With a reduced burden of programming responsibilities, the director was able to focus on strategy, staffing, creating new opportunities, and fundraising. The resulting increased focus on proposal development led to new funds being secured.

### Strengthen voice and visibility through effective communications

To attract and strengthen relations with partners and donors, organizations need to be seen and heard. They need to articulate their views on issues that define them, gain recognition for their expertise, be at the center of important events with partners and stakeholders, and share their findings and achievements with donors and other stakeholders. In analyzing their resource mobilization gaps and weaknesses, several organizations pinpointed the lack of an effective communication strategy and plans to enhance their profile among donors and potential partners.

Using a resource mobilize lens, AMHF strengthened its voice and visibility in the planning and coordination of the annual Pan-African Psychotrauma Conference, sponsored by the Peter C. Alderman Foundation. The conference brings together mental health and other health practitioners from across Africa for training and to share evidence on mental disorders in war-affected countries in the region. With logistical and financial support from other institutions, AMHF convened the 2015 international conference, attracting some 600 delegates from more than 10 countries. The collaboration not only succeeded in raising the profile of AMHF's work, it helped build new partnerships to advance the organization's research efforts, mission, and goals.

MNCHI also capitalized on stronger partnering and communication skills and strategies by hosting an international symposium on maternal and child health in 2014, together with Healthy Child Uganda, a Canadian-Ugandan university collaboration. The event drew some 140 donors, policymakers, ministry officials, university staff, health practitioners and researchers from Uganda, Tanzania, South Sudan, the United Kingdom and Canada. MNCHI used the symposium as an occasion to officially launch its web site. The event provided an opening to meet with funders, strengthening existing relationships and cultivating new ones. Among the results was a grant from UNICEF to increase community health outreach in a district of southwestern Uganda.

Jembi significantly ramped up its "brand" along with its national and international profile with a series of activities guided by a comprehensive new communications and publication strategy which it developed through the RMR process. A new website, a new unified design for its presentations and corporate materials – from folders to business cards - and a revamped brochure have given Jembi a more professional presence. The organization published its first ever annual report for 2012-13. Public outreach was amplified by press releases and the use of social media, including Facebook and Twitter. A

promotional video and creation of the “Jembi story” highlight the organization’s approach and projects in an engaging manner.

### Build on partnerships and affiliations

Networking and relationship building present opportunities that organizations may not be able to access on their own, and can lead to new capabilities and resources. A number of grantees successfully leveraged existing partnerships to generate new revenues.

At an RMR workshop in 2014, the Africa Mental Health Foundation (AMHF) discovered that it could join the Research Africa platform through its ties to the University of Nairobi. By using this fundraising tool to actively research funding prospects, AMHF accessed 10 potential grants during the RMR period, even as it continued to develop its resource mobilization strategy. During the same period, a valuable partnership with the county government of Makueni secured funding from Grand Challenges Canada to scale-up an existing project. This collaboration enhanced not only the sustainability of AMHF’s work at the project site but also the chance for uptake of research findings by local government.

The Nigerian NGO Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (LASDEL) also successfully leveraged partner and donor relations to build their funding base. In addition to developing a communication plan to raise their visibility, staff received training in negotiation skills, which they used to host a roundtable with their financial and technical partners. A number of partners agreed to consider institutional support for LASDEL, while others offered to advocate on their behalf for multi-year, government funding

IED Afrique had identified communication weaknesses and human resources as major constraints. It opted to focus on staff and board capacity, increasing its visibility and outreach to potential partners, and developing a plan for resource mobilization. A key strategy that contributed to all three of these areas was the recruitment of young professionals (interns) in order for the leader of the organization to invest more time in strategy development, outreach, fundraising, and organizational transformation. IED institutionalized its internship program by partnering with local universities to attract and train the next generation of professionals.

### Investing in success: Grant making strategies that can help organizations toward sustainability

One of the chief aims of the RMR program was to learn from the experience how IDRC and other grant making organizations can best tailor their investments to ensure that recipients can sustain their work beyond a project life cycle. These lessons draw on survey feedback and reports from staff and advisors closely involved with grantees, and grantees themselves.

### Ownership of the change process

Change has to come from within. While funders may lend the spark that ignites a change process, ultimately, organizations themselves must take the lead in pinpointing priorities for action. IDRC made RMR funding available only to organizations that self-identified targeted areas for change, and were willing to undergo an institutional assessment to validate their choices. This approach was affirmed in

survey responses by staff and advisors who worked with grantees, and in project reports by both Dalberg and Inyathelo, advisors to the cohort grantees.

In reflecting on organizational readiness for change, survey respondents pointed to the clarity of objectives that grantees were able to articulate from the outset. Those who succeeded the most had already identified areas to strengthen, or at least started with a recognition that changes were needed to enhance their sustainability.

***“Funders can make great opportunities available to organisations, but where they’re not ready to change, change will be hard to achieve.”***

Dalberg also noted that the institutional assessment helped both grantees and advisors keep their focus on priority areas throughout the RMR program.

Grant makers need to be attuned not only for signs of organizational “readiness” for change, but also to the life cycle stage at which organizations are seeking to make change. In a number of instances, the program worked with institutes that underwent leadership and other unexpected challenges that required a change in both approach and expectations. Organizations seeking to address funding declines are clearly in a different space than those seeking to expand their management capacity in the face of rapid growth and expansion. Be responsive in your approach: while IDRC experience points to the benefits of a whole-of-organization approach, organizations facing specific, urgent needs may benefit more from support in taking targeted, short-term measures.

### Be flexible, patient — and present

The “whole organizational” approach to RMR that IDRC promoted takes time and resources. While both the scale and duration of funding were modest, we supported both technical assistance and targeted measures to address OD priorities. The flexibility and availability of local organizational development experts to accompany the grantees helped them carry through on their changes, as did the constant involvement and flexibility of program staff.

***“Program Officers managing the grants were very responsive and flexible with extensions and supplements (when merited) to allow organizations to meet their objectives in a timely manner.”***

Our responsiveness and ongoing learning were facilitated by a close working relationship with grantees and the technical advisers that supported each cohort, through a triangular feedback loop and bilateral exchanges. Our continued presence in the support process helped to clarify roles and responsibility and ensure the relationship between grantees and advisers was healthy and serving the objective of strengthening grantees’ financial sustainability.

This flexible approach also enabled grantees to test innovations and take risks that they would not otherwise have had the resources to take on. IAGU, for example, used part of its RMR grant to develop and test a new income revenue stream by designing a university level certification in urban management for



professionals. While a planned university partnership to offer this certification fell through, IAGU pursued Ministry permission to offer the certificate independently. Without RMR support, it would not have taken the risk needed to develop its curriculum.

While most grantees achieved their aims, several respondents recommended that more time be factored in, noting the complexity of working across the organization, and the time needed to bring new and existing staff up to speed. In some instances, IDRC provided extensions to enable grantees to complete their planned activities.

Inyathelo observed that while most grantees had been able to meet their specific RMR objectives, achieving a longer term vision and capacities for advancement would demand ongoing effort. Several grantees who responded to the follow up survey did in fact note ongoing work to deepen changes begun during the RMR project. This can be considered a healthy outcome – a sign that organizations had internalized and were continuing the process of organizational change.

Both Dalberg and Inyathelo valued the sustained involvement of IDRC staff in supporting their relationship with grantees, as well as its collaboration in developing workshops and reflection processes. Dalberg noted that regular contact with IDRC allowed for lessons to be integrated throughout implementation. It noted frequent communication with the funder as key to identifying successes and potential bottlenecks.

***“The duration was short considering the recruitment processes and procedures.”***

### Ensure leadership buy-in

Given the RMR change process involved all functions and units of the grantee organizations, it was crucial for leaders to be actively engaged and supportive. The majority of the representatives from grantee organizations were executive directors and/or appointed by senior leadership to participate. In the cohorts, this level of commitment by the organizations strengthened peer learning and exchange as participants could identify with their peers’ employment position, responsibilities, and performance.

Both technical advisors underlined the importance of leadership involvement: Dalberg noted how in some cases, the changes made through the RMR process were profound, getting to the heart of an organization’s finances, governance, and relationships. Changes such as those made by INRAN, which completely overhauled its accounting and reporting system, would not have been possible without the support and involvement of leaders. Inyathelo underlined the need for leadership to inform, involve and drive advancement measures across the organisation, helping staff to see where they fit in the process.

***“There was a change in leadership [...] and the new leadership did not embrace the project at the beginning. This delayed reporting and consequently the funding.”***

The flip side of the importance of leadership is that changes in leadership – or a failure to buy in at the highest levels – proved one of the biggest challenges to successful RMR outcomes. This was particularly the case with organizations that are subordinate parts of a larger institution, as was the case with university and government institutions.

The support for Makerere University was an opportunity to test how IDRC could play a positive role in enhancing resource mobilization among southern-based universities, many of which suffer from a lack

of standard practice for business development; reductions in public funding; and variable quality in the programs and services they provide. At the time, Makerere was a significant grantee in IDRC's research portfolio, receiving some CAD 11 million in research grants. It had already embarked on major reforms, with a ten-year funding commitment from the Swedish aid agency SIDA. As that support ended in 2012, leadership sought to continue reforms. While IDRC's contribution was small compared to SIDA's or the size of Makerere budget, Makerere accomplished much in the process, including developing a range of financial and audit manuals, using strategically its 90's anniversary celebration to revamp its alumni and private sector strategy and adopting of a new research strategy. Subsequently Makerere attracted some US\$90 million in external support for research activities in 2013-14. The size and complexity of the institution, and its changes in leadership as the project begun, proved one of the most challenging cases to work with. However, the importance of the relationship between IDRC and Makerere University was key in ensuring that the project has an impact on keys resource mobilization practices.

MNCHI's RMR process was also affected by its status as a university institute. Its creation in 2012 coincided with a change of leadership within Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), which houses MNCHI. While the Institute recruited a coordinator in 2014 to manage its advancement process, a protracted succession process within MUST delayed the establishment of the MNCHI steering committee and advisory board.

Dalberg also observed the additional effort that was required in accompanying INRAN, a national research institution, which also underwent a change at the director level during its process of organizational change. While it accomplished much, the institution had weightier administrative procedures to respect, and could not make decisions with the same speed and independence as other cohort members. However, IDRC support to an accounting software triggered a long due innovation change, into which INRAN matched our fund to train staff for its implementation.

### Foster peer learning

The nine institutions that made up two RMR cohorts gained not just from the expert technical support of Dalberg or Inyathelo: they also learned from each other. Peer exchange and learning were built into the workshop curriculum and into the development of narratives used to capture learning on organizational change. Because cohort members were regionally and thematically matched, they had much in common, and were able to share and identify with common challenges and gain insights from each other's approaches. Dalberg noted how cohort members were influenced by others who took different approaches to shared issues. LASDEL, for example, opted to invest in upgrading its communication capacity after an impressive presentation by IED Afrique on its communication strategy and tools. Dalberg proposed that professional exchanges between peer institutions might be another means of fostering peer learning.

### Document learning

Learning from the experience of advisers and grantees was built in at several stages of RMR programming, and enabled effective program monitoring and quick responses to issues as they arose. By documenting learning throughout the support process, grant makers can better adapt to changes, and continuously refine their grant-making strategies. Grantees can also benefit from documenting their own RMR journey, both for internal decision-making, and external communication.



IDRC program staff were closely involved in RMR program implementation and monitoring, and incorporated important learning features into the program design. This included developing a narrative framework for the “stories of change”<sup>7</sup> which each cohort participant produced to capture their organizational changes. Using a writeshop approach, grantees were encouraged to document their challenges and successes. In final workshop, time for writing, peer review and exchange, and editing of the change stories was key to allow capturing of main lessons,. While individual grantees were not asked to use this narrative approach to document change, two of them – Lacor Hospital and Jembi – applied storytelling approaches to their external communication efforts.

Technical advisers who worked with the East and West African cohorts were a valuable source of insights into the success and challenges each grantee faced in their change process. Their perspectives on lessons learned are captured in their final reports. A final step in understanding what worked and what didn’t in RMR support approaches, after program completion was to survey participant organizations, technical advisers, and staff members who had worked with the grantees to gain their views on the effectiveness of RMR support strategies and how sustainable organizational change was for participating organizations.

## Conclusions

The organizational performance of grantees is a central concern for IDRC, in its ongoing support to research organizations. With a focus on the financial sustainability of participating grantees, the RMR program served to complement IDRC’s primary investments in research for development.

Our results from this latest round of RMR support – providing a modest amount of funding for regionally-based technical assistance combined with a short timeframe for making targeted changes – suggest that funders can make a worthwhile and cost effective contribution to grantees’ sustainability.

While methods varied slightly between cohorts and among individual grantees, all benefited from focusing their time and energies on the long term horizon, and most saw meaningful changes in their plans, their governance, their staff competencies, their visibility and their ability to network. Committing to engage in the process constituted a rare opportunity for organizations that typically must invest most, if not all, of their resources on securing and executing short term projects. Funders can play a valuable role in helping grantees carve out this space for reflection and change as a complement to their primary funding priorities. In doing so, they may enhance the likelihood that their core program investments achieve high quality results that can be sustained.

While funders have limited influence over the external environment in which grantees operate, they can help them better adapt to this ever changing context. Investing in organizational development enables grantees to strengthen core functions such as leadership, planning, communications, and fundraising which are connected to an organization’s transformational capacity and ability to fulfill its mandate and mission. Supporting organizations and their leaders so they can thrive, adapt, and make significant advances in their field can play a vital part in securing the investments of IDRC and other funders.

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<sup>7</sup> See Annex A for a list of stories of change.

## Annex A: Documenting Learning on Organizational Change

Stories of change by participating grantees:

- [Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology: Strengthening leadership and governance for impact](#) (p. 8)
- [Africa Mental Health Foundation: Building a sustainable African centre of excellence](#) (p.13)
- [Maternal Newborn and Child Health Institute : Strengthening capacity for resource mobilisation at MNCHI](#) (p.18)
- [Research for Equity and Community Health Trust: Moving towards an effective and sustainable health research institution](#) (p.23)
- [Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local](#)
- [Innovations Environnement Développement](#),
- [Institut Africain de Gestion Urbaine](#)
- [Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger](#)
- [Initiatives pour un développement durable](#)
- [Jembi Health Systems](#)

Perspectives from Inyathelo:

[What we are learning: perspectives from a resource mobilisation for research program](#),

English summary of learning from the West African cohort of grantees:

[Beyond fundraising \(West Africa\)](#)



## Annex B: RMR Survey

### Questions for grantees

#### A. On IDRC's RMR grant making approach:

Through the RMR project, you were given a flexible range of support to help you identify and work on priority areas for organizational strengthening.

1. Did the support help you focus on the right priorities?  
Yes                      No                      Partly  
Please elaborate
2. a) For the priorities you chose to address, did the RMR project provide the right amount of time and money for you to make meaningful change?  
Yes                      No                      Partly  
Please elaborate  
  
b) Did you have to use your own resources to supplement project funding in any areas?  
Yes                      No  
If so, in what areas?
3. Was the investment cost-effective or might the money have been better spent in other ways to strengthen your organization?  
a) Cost-effective      b) could have spent money in better ways  
Please elaborate:

#### B. On your organizational development results:

1. Have you been able to sustain the organizational changes you made through the RMR process?  
Yes                      No                      Somewhat  
Please elaborate
2. Have there been any unexpected consequences of the changes you made?  
Yes                      No  
If so, positive or negative?  
Please elaborate
3. Are you continuing to work on these or other areas of organizational strengthening?  
Yes                      No  
If so, please elaborate
4. Since completing the RMR project, has your organization taken on new projects or directions that you would attribute to the organizational changes you made?  
Yes                      No  
If so, please elaborate

## Questions for technical advisors and staff

### A. On IDRC's RMR grant making approach:

Through the RMR project, organizations you worked with were given a flexible range of support to help them identify, and work on, priority areas for organizational strengthening.

1. Do you think the support helped them focus on the right priorities?  
Yes                      No                      Partly  
Please elaborate
2. Did the RMR project provide the right amount of time and money for grantees to make meaningful change?  
Yes                      No                      Partly  
Please elaborate
3. Was the investment cost-effective or might the money have been better spent in other ways to strengthen these organizations?  
a) Cost-effective    b) could have spent money in better ways  
Please elaborate:

### B. On grantees' organizational development results:

1. Among the organizations you supported through RMR, what were the most common organizational challenges?
2. Are the resource mobilization challenges facing research organizations unique in any way?  
Yes                      No  
Please elaborate
3. Which areas of organizational strengthening did you feel RMR was best able to respond to?
4. Based on your experience supporting research organizations in RMR, what are the signs you would look for to know that an organization is ready to undergo organizational change?
5. Are there areas of organizational development that simply cannot be tackled by outside support, or limits to what outside support can provide?

## Annex C: RMR Participating Grantees

[African Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Alternativas y Capacidades](#)

[Centre de Suivi Ecologique](#)

[Centro de Estudios para la Equidad y Gobernanza en Los Salud](#)

[Initiative Développement Intégré Durable](#)

[Initiative Environnement Développement](#)

[Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger](#)

[Institut Africain de Gestion Urbaine](#)

[Jembi Health Systems](#)

[Kilimanjaro Center for Community Ophthalmology](#)

[Laboratoire d'Etudes et de la Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Locale](#)

[Makerere University](#)

[Maternal Newborn and Child Health Institute, Mbarara University of Science and Technology](#)

[Research for Equity and Community Health Trust](#)

[Lacor Hospital, Teasdale-Corti Foundation](#)

[Uganda Chartered HealthNet](#)